

STATEMENT

OF THE

BOARD OF MANAGERS

OF THE

NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN

TO THE

Board of Estimate & Apportionment

OF THE

CITY OF NEW YORK.

TOGETHER WITH A

LETTER

TO HIS HONOR,

MAYOR WILLIAM L. STRONG.

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1897.

BOARD OF MANAGERS
OF THE
NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN,
1897.

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TO THE BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND APPORTIONMENT.

GENTLEMEN:

At a meeting of the Board of Managers of the New York Botanical Garden, held September 27th, 1897, the following statement was ordered presented to your Honorable Board:

The establishment of a botanical garden in the City of New York has been actively prosecuted since the year 1889, the necessary legislation having been obtained in an act passed in 1891 and amended in 1894 and 1896. The project through all this period received most cordial support from the city officials and from the public.

The present Board of Managers was organized on March 21st, 1895, and on June 18th, 1895, the condition of the Act of Incorporation requiring the subscription of \$250,000 was fully met. At a meeting of the Managers held on that date, a special committee of five members was appointed as a Committee on Plans, and this Committee has been since continued. The securing of the necessary \$250,000 as a subscription fund was reported to the Commissioners of Parks, and in the summer of 1895 the said Commissioners approved the selection of grounds for the Garden in Bronx Park, as authorized and directed by the Act of Incorporation, and this selection of site was duly accepted by the Board of Managers. On October 30th, 1895, the present

Board of Estimate and Apportionment authorized the issue of bonds to an amount not exceeding \$25,000 for surveys, plans, etc.; but these have not been issued.

Prior to the organization of the Board of Managers, many of the members of the corporation had given continuous study to the project since its inception. Several of them have made critical studies of botanical gardens in the Old World.

The Committee on Plans, appointed in June, 1895, studied the subject in all its aspects for a year, with the aid of advice and suggestion from many botanists, landscape gardeners, architects, and others interested, in this country and in Europe, and determined the principal ends desirable to be reached, and the most economic, artistic and practical methods of reaching them, having always in mind the beautiful natural features of the grounds and the great value of these to the institution; their preservation has been determined on from the very first.

On June 17th, 1896, the preparation of a general plan, to embody the results reached after this long and careful consideration, was referred to a commission of experts, consisting of N. L. Britton, Director-in-Chief; R. W. Gibson, Architect; John R. Brinley, Civil and Landscape Engineer; Lucien M. Underwood, Professor of Botany, Columbia University; Samuel Henshaw, Landscape Gardener; Lincoln Pierson, Secretary, Lord & Burnham Co., Greenhouse Architects. All these are men well and favorably known in their professions, and it is maintained that in this commission were included all the elements necessary or desirable for the purposes of the general study, the determination of the detailed landscape treatment and special planting being wisely deferred until the general scheme had been approved; these will be taken up under the best advice obtainable.

Prior to the appointment of this commission an accurate topographical survey and map had been made, showing the exact location of every tree, ledge, bank, or other natural feature, and the altitude of every point in the tract.

On October 9th, 1895, the Board of Managers requested the Commissioners of Parks to construct driveways in the grounds, and the matter was referred to the Superintendent of Parks, with directions to confer with the Committee, and Mr. Calvert Vaux, landscape architect of the Park Board, was detailed by the said Commissioners on the same work. Mr. Vaux prepared a preliminary study for the driveways, and copies of it, approved by Mr. Parsons subsequently to the death of Mr. Vaux, were given to the Committee.

Working from the topographical survey and from this road study, our experts, map in hand, on the grounds, critically and with the greatest care, in consultation with other experts, and with the members of the Committee on Plans of the Board of Managers, developed the main features of the general plan. Supt. Parsons was frequently consulted and was repeatedly on the ground. The Commissioners of Parks were thus represented throughout the work of planning. Meanwhile the study of plans for the buildings had been steadily prosecuted. Architects were selected after a prolonged examination of competitive designs for the main buildings, and were nominated to the Commissioners of Public Parks on June 18th, 1896, who replied that they looked favorably upon the selection of architects, but stated that they could not approve the plans until they were submitted in complete form, together with specifications, as required in other museum buildings of the city, and asked that we have the plans completed as quickly as possible. They were so completed early in the present year, and were submitted, together with specifications, duly approved by

the Board of Managers of the Garden, subject to such changes or modifications as might hereafter be found necessary. The Commissioners of Parks referred the plans to a commission, and received from that commission a report disapproving of the locations of certain of the buildings.

Several conferences were subsequently held between the Committee on Plans of the Board of Managers and the Commissioners of Public Parks, at the request of the latter, as a result of which three dwelling houses for officers of the Garden, proposed by the Board of Managers, were withdrawn, and the sites suggested for the conservatories and power house were changed, the Committee on Plans acceding to all the modifications suggested by the Commissioners of Parks. The plans were then formally approved by the Commissioners of Parks, in accordance with the act of incorporation.

Throughout the whole study the most careful attention has been given to the preservation of the natural features of the grounds, and it has been a matter of congratulation among those who have been interested and informed that essentially all their sylvan beauty has been preserved intact. Every tree or bank which would be in any way effected by the construction of roads, paths, buildings or planting has been most carefully considered, and the result has been that very few healthy or perfect trees will be disturbed, and the necessary grading will not be a serious item. It is maintained that no more critical advance study of a plot of ground has ever been made. The sites agreed upon for the buildings do not necessitate the destruction of any trees desirable to retain, the museum and conservatories being located on open plateaus near Bedford Park Station. It has, of course, been necessary that the administrative and mechanical features of the plans should be most carefully

considered. The distribution of the vast crowds of people which may be expected to visit the Garden in the future, the number visiting the gardens at Kew, England, having reached hundreds of thousands in one day, has necessitated the placing of the main buildings and other principal features of interest at considerable distances from each other. To make possible the proper management and proper supervision of crowds, and to prevent them from becoming dangerous to each other and destructive to the Garden, such separation is a prime necessity. The questions of a proper system of water supply, sewerage and drainage have been given close attention, and the plan of water pipes has received the unqualified approval of the Chief Engineer of the Croton Aqueduct. Economic construction and maintenance have been carefully borne in mind throughout the study. Horticultural and decorative treatment has been abundantly provided for by the allotment of space, and will be properly developed in the detailed landscape treatment. About sixty-five acres of the two hundred and fifty will be preserved intact as natural forest, including all the picturesque portion of the Bronx Valley, and all the parts to be brought under high cultivation are at present nearly treeless slopes and meadows.

The general plan is therefore adequate and satisfactory; it provides for fine artistic, architectural, decorative and landscape effects, for the satisfactory prosecution of the educational and scientific work of the institution, for the preservation of the natural features, and for great additions to their natural beauty. It permits a large degree of elasticity in its development, which must require many years for its completion, and provides abundant room for modifications in detail as may hereafter be desired.

The Board of Managers intend to make the Botanical

Garden the most attractive and useful part of the city's park system ; its development must proceed cautiously, and it is impossible that everybody's taste can be suited ; but the assurance may confidently be given that no hurtful change will be made in existing natural features of beauty.

Respectfully submitted by the

BOARD OF MANAGERS.

APPENDIX.

LETTER TO MAYOR STRONG.

August 28th, 1897.

HON. WILLIAM L. STRONG,
Mayor of the City of New York.

MY DEAR SIR :

Referring to the request of the Commissioners of Public Parks, made July 19th, 1897, in pursuance of the act of incorporation of the New York Botanical Garden and its amendment, that the Board of Estimate and Apportionment authorize the issuing of the bonds for the erection of buildings for the Garden, I would submit the following statement :

The Board of Managers of the Garden have fully complied with all the requirements of the act of incorporation, this act having been previously cordially approved by the City's officials. They have raised by subscription the sum of \$264,000.00, and have also enlisted the support of 542 annual members, who pay ten dollars a year.

They have already accumulated over 2,000 different kinds of herbaceous plants, shrubs and trees in the grounds and in a temporary greenhouse, which are already serving a considerable educational function.

They have conducted extensive preliminary operations in grading rough banks, filling and draining low places, clearing up rubbish, and otherwise improving the grounds.

They have brought together by purchase, gifts, exchanges and deposits over 700,000 specimens for the Museum Building, and over 10,000 books and pamphlets, and have conducted popular lecture courses.

Their expenditures from their own funds for these purposes and for surveys and plans have been over \$25,000.00.

The Commissioners of Public Parks in 1895 approved the selection of the site for the Botanical Garden, and in accordance with the act of incorporation appropriated 250 acres of land in Bronx Park for the purposes of the institution, and this allotment of land was duly accepted by the Board of Managers.

The Commissioners of Public Parks on June 21st, 1897, adopted the following resolution :

RESOLVED :—That the plans now before this Board, as prepared and submitted by the Board of Managers of the New York Botanical Garden, showing proposed buildings to be erected on the grounds allotted for the use of the New York Botanical Garden in Bronx Park, be and the same hereby are approved, reserving, however, the right to determine as to a driveway entrance at Scott Avenue, and the width thereof.

The Commissioners of Public Parks on July 19th, 1897, adopted the following resolutions :

RESOLVED :—That the Board of Estimate and Apportionment be and hereby is respectfully requested to authorize the Comptroller to issue bonds to the amount of five hundred thousand dollars (\$500,000), in the manner provided by Chapter 285 of the Laws of 1891 as amended by Chapter 717 of the Laws of 1896, in such sums as may be from time to time required for the purpose of erecting Museum and other buildings on the lands allotted for the use of the New York Botanical Garden in Bronx Park.

RESOLVED :—That the plans, specifications and forms of contract this day received for the erection of a Museum building, power house, stable, closet group and greenhouses in Bronx Park for the purpose of the New York Botanical Garden be approved, and the specifications and form of contract ordered printed, and when printed and approved as to form by the Counsel to the Corporation, and funds shall be available therefore, that an advertisement be inserted in "The City Record" inviting proposals for doing the work.

RESOLVED :—That the selection by the Board of Managers of the New York Botanical Garden of R. W. Gibson and Lord & Burnham Company as architects of buildings to be erected on the grounds set apart for the use of said Garden in Bronx Park, be and hereby is approved, and that the compensation of said architects be and hereby is fixed at 5% of the cost of the several works upon which they may be respectively employed.

All the steps preparatory to the erection of the buildings have therefore been taken, and it is earnestly requested that the Board of Estimate and Apportionment authorize the issue of the bonds provided for, in order that the development of the institution may go forward rapidly and economically.

Yours very respectfully,

N. L. BRITTON,

Director-in-Chief.

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